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STATE SPONSORS NEW APPROACHES TO STORMWATER CONTROL IN WILMINGTON

BOSTON - The Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) and the town of Wilmington have announced their collaboration on a series of projects to improve water quality in Silver Lake, a prime recreational resource in Wilmington. The project is one of nine demonstration projects funded through a Targeted Watersheds grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), aimed at restoring the Ipswich River.

According to a representative from the Wilmington Board of Health, Silver Lake has been degraded by polluted stormwater runoff, which flows over paved surfaces and through the storm drain system directly into the lake. Over the past five years, the Wilmington Board of Health has had to close the town beach at least once each season because of high bacteria counts.

The Silver Lake demonstration projects will showcase "low-impact development" (LID) techniques designed to reduce runoff and provide some treatment of stormwater before it enters the lake. Design plans for the Silver Lake project are currently being developed by GeoSyntec Consultants of Acton, and are expected to be complete by the end of the summer. Construction will begin after the prime beach season ends in September.

A public meeting is planned for Tuesday, July 26th at 7:00 p.m. at Wilmington Town Hall to present the design plan for the projects. A brochure explaining the project will also be mailed to all Wilmington Water Department customers with their July water bills.

"Stormwater recharge is a key element of the state's new Water Policy," said Stephen Pritchard, Massachusetts Secretary of Environmental Affairs. "This grant partnership offers an opportunity to demonstrate the benefits of low-impact development techniques, which not only reduce runoff, but also promote stormwater recharge."

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“Decreased runoff and increased recharge are really two sides of the same coin,” explained Robert W. Varney, regional administrator of EPA’s New England office. “The Targeted Watershed grant provides an opportunity to see how LID techniques can help valued recreational resources like Silver Lake and highly stressed rivers like the Ipswich River.”

According to DCR project manager Sara Cohen, LID techniques to be installed around Silver Lake include “bioretention cells” and “rain gardens,” which are landscaped areas that use special soils and plantings to retain and filter stormwater. Rain gardens will be installed near the street edge on selected properties along Silver Lake Avenue and Dexter Street, two streets that currently drain directly to the lake. Bioretention cells will be constructed in the town beach parking lot. The parking lot itself will be reconstructed using two types of porous paving materials, which allow stormwater to sink into the ground, reducing pollution from surface runoff, while promoting groundwater recharge.

Another project element consists of the replacement of a stormwater pipe at the town beach with a vegetated swale, which will both filter and infiltrate runoff and eliminate goose habitat. Goose droppings on the lawn have been identified as a likely source of bacteria that has led to beach closings in the past. Elimination of the geese habitat is expected to eliminate the droppings.

Lastly, the project will incorporate a “pocket wetland,” which is a small area with water-loving plants to filter runoff as it enters the lake at the base of Silver Lake Avenue.

“We are delighted to partner with DCR and EPA on this project,” said Jamie Magaldi, Assistant Public Works Superintendent in Wilmington. “It enables us to revitalize a high-profile area of town. Residents will notice a big improvement in the appearance of the beach parking lot, which will include plantings that will have the dual function of filtering runoff and looking attractive.”

The U.S. Geological Survey, another project partner, will be monitoring changes in water quality and runoff volumes associated with all the above techniques.

The EPA Targeted Watersheds Program is a nationwide program that supports projects to protect and restore the country’s water resources through a holistic watershed approach to water quality management. DCR received one of 14 grants awarded nationally, from Alaska to New Hampshire, in 2004.

At the July 26th public meeting, DCR representatives will also provide an update on the Rainwater Harvesting Demonstration Project in Wilmington, another project funded by the EPA grant.

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